Speech By

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ADOPTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr JANETZKI (Toowoomba South—LNP) (10.32 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Adoption and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. The bill before the House seeks to make changes to the Adoption Act 2009 as a result of a review of the act as required by the legislation. As we speak about adoption in this House it is important to reflect on the history of adoption in this country.

The early years of adoption in Australia were marked by a period of closed adoption. This included people being subjected to unauthorised separation from their children, which then resulted in what was often called forced adoption. It was not until the 1970s that there were reforms to overturn the secrecy around previous adoption practices, although until further changes were made over the next two decades information on birth parents was not made available to adopted children or adults. The current legislation was the product of such advocacy to further move to full open transparent adoption.

The bill before the House has a range of objectives relating to the adoption framework in Queensland. They include the broadening of eligibility criteria to enable single persons, same-sex couples and persons undergoing fertility treatment to have their name placed on the expression of interest register. The bill proposes to remove the offence for a breach of contact statement for adoptions that occurred before 1991 while retaining departmental obligations as a safeguard. It will also enable the chief executive to consider the release of identifying information to persons under 18 years of age in exceptional circumstances without consent from adoptive or birth parents and broaden the definition of 'relative' to include future generations of kin. Other proposed amendments include requiring the court to be satisfied that exceptional circumstances apply to allow a change of child's first name in a final adoption order, streamlining the process for adoption by step-parents and enabling guardians of children on long-term care orders in the child protection system to be considered for adoption. This was a significant recommendation arising from the Carmody inquiry.

There are other questions arising from the Carmody inquiry as to how far the department intends to take recommendations relating to children in long-term guardianship arrangements being considered for adoption where reunification has failed. We now have more than 9,000 children in out-of-home care and over 5,800 with long-term guardianship orders in place. I note Carmody's recommendation that further consideration be given to the use of adoption for these children.

There are a number of concerns with the proposed bill and the rushed consultation and committee reporting process that was undertaken which, for instance, allowed only three weeks for submissions to be lodged. I note that the shadow minister for child safety has outlined these concerns in her contribution to the bill.

There has been no demonstration for the need to expand or grow the number of eligible adoptive parents based on the limited number of children needing adoption in Queensland each year. I note that there appears to be little demand for adoption in Queensland, with only 48 adoption orders finalised in 2015-16, with 21 of these adoptions Queensland adoptions and the remainder constituted by international adoptions. As canvassed, there are a range of issues that need to be addressed by the government in relation to aspects of the bill and the rushed consultation and parliamentary committee process.